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2010 NOV 29 PM 4:47

November 29, 2010



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Foreign Minister for the Republic of Yemen

Posted: November 24, 2010 01:34 PM

We Must Not Satisfy Terrorist Objectives by Blaming Each Other for Security Concerns

On 22 November, Yemen welcomed its neighbors to one of the largest soccer competitions in the Arab world. For two weeks teams from Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen will fight it out for the 20th Gulf Cup of Nations.

The tournament is an opportunity to showcase the great gains Yemen has made in recent years in the fields of security, tourism and wider economic development. The hosting of the Cup in the port city of Aden will also highlight the potential of the thriving Free Zone which is at the heart of commercial and economic activity in Yemen.

Bringing the Gulf Cup of Nations to Aden is a powerful reminder that, contrary to much reporting, normal life continues in Yemen. Those who have been reading the international press in recent weeks, who have not had the good fortune to visit our country and enjoy its rich history and age-old traditions of hospitality, would naturally conclude that there was little to Yemen other than the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It is a shame that this false image has become so prevalent because nothing could be further from the truth.

There has, quite rightly, been great concern expressed over the parcel bomb planted on a cargo plane by AQAP and the security implications of it. Thanks to the intelligence cooperation

between our friends and allies, mercifully lives were not lost.

However, the prompt reactions of several governments unfortunately tarnished Yemen's image before the investigation has even been completed. This sort of reaction is one of AQAP's objectives. In these circumstances we therefore need calm, sensible discussion about a security issue that affects us all and must avoid any actions that regrettably play into the terrorists' hands.

It is important to remember, as many governments around the world already know, that terrorism knows no boundaries. The scourge of terrorism is a truly international phenomenon. It is in no way unique to the Arabian Gulf. What has been almost entirely absent from recent commentary is news of the actions we have taken against AQAP and the successes Yemeni security forces have achieved. We have disrupted and eliminated terrorist cells, captured members of AQAP, uncovered safe havens, confiscated large quantities of explosives, seized weapons caches and gained vital intelligence of benefit to Yemen and its allies. Commentators around the world frequently refer to the 23 suspected terrorists who escaped from prison in 2006. What they do not mention is that of those 23, eight have been killed in pursuit and 12 are back in prison. We are vigorously pursuing the remaining three. Every day we make further inroads into Al Qaeda's ranks.

We recognize that using force is only one part of the solution. This is why we have put 600 Al Qaeda sympathizers through our meticulously designed rehabilitation program. Many of them have now married, got jobs, renounced their extremist ideology and are integrated in their communities. There is no doubt that economic development will ultimately be the longer term solution to generate employment and isolate and undermine the extremists. A stable, prosperous Yemen will provide no safe haven for the enemies of peace.

It does no one, except the deluded terrorists themselves, any good to exaggerate the threat AQAP represents in Yemen or indeed elsewhere. If underestimating one's enemy is a disaster waiting to happen, overestimating him is also a mistake. The numbers of AQAP in Yemen are steadily diminishing as our operations continue to achieve results. We appreciate the support we receive from our friends and neighbors, who have helped build our capabilities. Make no mistake. Far from being a resurgent force that threatens Yemen and the region, AQAP is very firmly on the back foot.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure the international community that the Yemeni government remains steadfast in its commitment to root out terrorism. Our security forces will continue their relentless efforts to fight against Al Qaeda. The people of Yemen stand firm behind their government and its fight against radicalization and terrorism.

Yemen is now ready to celebrate the Gulf Cup competition with the rest of the Arab world.

I am sure that the Yemeni people will ensure the success of the event and the safety of our guests. On my part I wish all teams success and look forward to a memorable competition.